

1
2
3
4
5
6 UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
7 WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
8 AT SEATTLE

9 ERNESTO VILLAFLO, R

10 Plaintiff,

11 v.

12 U.S. POSTAL SERVICE; MEGAN
13 BRENNAN, POSTMASTER GENERAL;
14 YUN HEE LEE; RON HARRELL, JULIO
15 RODRIGUEZ,

16 Defendants.

Case No. C16-1757 RSM

ORDER GRANTING DEFENDANTS'
MOTION TO DISMISS

17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25 **I. INTRODUCTION**

26 This matter comes before the Court on Defendants' Motion to Dismiss claims against
27 Defendants United States Postal Service, Yun Hee Lee, Ron Harrell, and Julio Rodriguez
28 pursuant to Rules 12(b)(1) and 12(b)(6). Dkt. #19. Plaintiff Ernesto Villaflo opposes this
Motion. Dkt. #18. For the reasons stated below, the Court GRANTS Defendants' Motion
under Rule 12(b)(6), dismisses Mr. Villaflo's claims against all Defendants except Megan
Brennan with prejudice, and dismisses Mr. Villaflo's ADA claim with leave to amend.

25 **II. BACKGROUND**

26 Plaintiff Ernesto Villaflo alleges that he is an employee of the United States Postal
27 Service. See Dkt. #1 at ¶ 1. Mr. Villaflo alleges he was discriminated against in his
28

1 employment by his employer due to his disability, race, color, gender, and age and also was
2 retaliated against for engaging in protected EEO activity. *See id.* at ¶¶ 20-62. Mr. Villaflor
3 names as defendants the United States Postal Service, Postmaster General Megan Brennan, sued
4 in her official capacity, and Mr. Villaflor’s supervisors, Yun Hee Lee, Ron Harrell, and Julio
5 Rodriguez, sued in their individual capacity. *See id.* at ¶¶ 2-6, 63. Mr. Villaflor alleges that
6 Defendants Lee, Harrell, and Rodriguez were supervisors at the Post Office where he worked
7 and that they “acted within the scope and authority of their employment with the United States
8 Postal Service.” *Id.* at ¶ 19. Defendant Brennan admits these allegations. *See* Dkt. #8 at ¶ 19.

10 On January 17, 2017, Defendants United States Postal Service and Postmaster General
11 Megan Brennan (“Postal Service” and “Brennan”) filed their Answer. *See id.* The Court
12 granted Individual Defendants’ “Unopposed Motion to Extend Deadline to Respond to
13 Plaintiffs’ Complaint” so that these defendants, Lee, Harrell, and Rodriguez, could obtain DOJ
14 authorization for legal representation. *See* Dkts. ##14 and 16. Individual Defendants Lee and
15 Harrell file this motion to dismiss as their response to the plaintiff’s complaint. Defendants
16 Postal Service and Brennan join in the motion. Defense counsel has represented efforts to
17 represent Defendant Rodriguez and the difficulty in doing so due to his serious illness. *See*
18 Dkt. #21.

21 III. DISCUSSION

22 A. Legal Standard

23 In making a 12(b)(6) assessment, the court accepts all facts alleged in the complaint as
24 true, and makes all inferences in the light most favorable to the non-moving party. *Baker v.*
25 *Riverside County Office of Educ.*, 584 F.3d 821, 824 (9th Cir. 2009) (internal citations omitted).
26 However, the court is not required to accept as true a “legal conclusion couched as a factual
27
28

1 allegation.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*,
2 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)). The complaint “must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as
3 true, to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Id.* at 678. This requirement is met
4 when the plaintiff “pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference
5 that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Id.* The complaint need not include
6 detailed allegations, but it must have “more than labels and conclusions, and a formulaic
7 recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do.” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555. Absent
8 facial plausibility, Plaintiff’s claims must be dismissed. *Id.* at 570.

10 Where a complaint is dismissed for failure to state a claim, “leave to amend should be
11 granted unless the court determines that the allegation of other facts consistent with the
12 challenged pleading could not possibly cure the deficiency.” *Schreiber Distrib. Co. v. Serv-*
13 *Well Furniture Co.*, 806 F.2d 1393, 1401 (9th Cir. 1986).

15 **B. Standing**

16 As an initial matter, Mr. Villaflor argues that defense counsel does not have “standing”
17 to file this Motion on behalf of Defendant Julio Rodriguez or that the Motion cannot apply to
18 him. Dkt. #24 at 2-3. Mr. Villaflor cites to no legal authority. The Court finds that
19 Defendants’ arguments apply equally to Mr. Rodriguez and that the Court has the authority to
20 dismiss claims against Mr. Rodriguez even if this Motion was brought by his co-defendants.
21 The Court notes that defense counsel has taken reasonable efforts to represent Mr. Rodriguez.
22

24 **C. ADA Claim against Federal Employer**

25 Plaintiff’s First Cause of Action is brought pursuant to the Americans with Disability
26 Act (“ADA”), 42 U.S.C. § 12112. *See* Dkt. #1, ¶¶ 42-47, 60-62. Defendants argue that this
27 claim should be dismissed because the ADA does not apply to federal employers. Dkt. #19 at 3
28

1 (citing *Maish v. Napolitano*, No. C12-581RAJ, 2013 WL 5770345, at *4 (W.D. Wash. Oct. 24,
2 2013); *Cornette v. Potter*, No. C09-5373BHS, 2009 WL 5195793, at *3 (W.D. Wash. Dec. 21,
3 2009), *aff'd sub nom. Cornette v. Donahoe*, 472 F. App'x 482 (9th Cir. 2012)). Defendants
4 argue that the exclusive remedy is under the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. § 791, *et seq. Id.*
5 Mr. Villaflor essentially concedes these points in his Response. *See* Dkt. #24 at 4. The Court
6 will therefore dismiss this cause of action and encourages Mr. Villaflor to amend.
7

8 **D. Claims against Individual Defendants and the USPS**

9 Defendants argue that the only proper defendant for all of Mr. Villaflor's claims is the
10 "head of the department, agency or unit." Dkt. #19 at 3 (citing *Johnston v. Horne*, 875 F.2d
11 1415, 1418–19 (9th Cir. 1989)); Dkt. #19 at 4 (citing 42 U.S.C. § 2000e(c)-16; *Romain v.*
12 *Shear*, 799 F.2d 1416, 1418-19 (9th Cir. 1986); *Scott v. Moniz*, No. C14-5684 RJB, 2014 WL
13 12539672, at *2 (W.D. Wash. Nov. 17, 2014)). Defendants argue that Title VII does not
14 impose individual liability on employees, even supervisors. *Id.* at 4 (citing, *inter alia*, *Greenlaw*
15 *v. Garrett*, 59 F.3d 994, 1001 (9th Cir. 1995)).
16
17

18 In Response, Mr. Villaflor argues that the individual Defendants in this case are liable
19 under the alter ego doctrine, citing only to a case interpreting New York law, which dealt with a
20 non-federal employer. Dkt. #24 at 5-6 (citing *Lane v. Maryhaven Ctr. of Hope*, 944 F. Supp.
21 158 (E.D.N.Y. 1996)).
22

23 On Reply, Defendants argue that Mr. Villaflor's reliance on *Lane* is misplaced, first
24 because the *Lane* court actually granted the defendant's motion to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(6),
25 and second because *Lane* involved a corporate employer and not a federal government
26 employer. Dkt. #28 at 2. Defendants point out that Mr. Villaflor fails to address "federal
27 statutory authority and Ninth Circuit precedent identified in Defendants' motion that directs that
28

1 the only proper defendant in a federal employment discrimination action is the head of the
2 department, agency, or unit, sued in an official capacity only.” *Id.* at 1.

3 The Court agrees with Defendants. The individual Defendants acted within the scope
4 and authority of their employment, and the employer in this case is a federal agency. The law is
5 clear that they cannot be sued individually, and Mr. Villaflor presents no valid argument
6 otherwise. An alter-ego analysis as described in *Lane* is inapplicable here for the reasons stated
7 by Defendants. The Court will dismiss with prejudice under Rule 12(b)(6) all claims against
8 Defendants United States Postal Service, Yun Hee Lee, Ron Harrell, and Julio Rodriguez. The
9 only proper defendant in this federal employment discrimination action is Defendant Megan
10 Brennan, Postmaster General, sued in her official capacity only. The Court need not conduct a
11 Rule 12(b)(1) analysis given the above.
12

14 E. Leave to Amend

15 Where a complaint is dismissed for failure to state a claim, “leave to amend should be
16 granted unless the court determines that the allegation of other facts consistent with the
17 challenged pleading could not possibly cure the deficiency.” *Schreiber, supra*. The Court finds
18 that Mr. Villaflor should be granted leave solely to amend his ADA claim to properly assert
19 claims under the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. § 791, *et seq.* Mr. Villaflor cannot present other
20 facts consistent with the existing Complaint that could cure the other deficiencies above.
21

22 IV. CONCLUSION

23 Having reviewed the relevant pleadings, the declarations and exhibits attached thereto,
24 and the remainder of the record, the Court hereby finds and ORDERS:
25

- 26 1) Defendants’ Motion to Dismiss (Dkt. #19) is GRANTED. Plaintiff’s claims against
27 Defendants United States Postal Service, Yun Hee Lee, Ron Harrell, and Julio
28

Rodriguez are DISMISSED with prejudice. Plaintiff's first cause of action, brought under the ADA, is dismissed without prejudice.

- 2) Plaintiff is granted leave to amend his first cause of action **no later than twenty-one (21) days** from the date of this Order. Failure to file an Amended Complaint within this time period will result in dismissal of these claims.

DATED this 7th day of July 2017.



RICARDO S. MARTINEZ
CHIEF UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE